



The Salvation Army

Australia Southern Territory Headquarters

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Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
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Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs - Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and two related bills.

Overview

On behalf of The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory (AUS), I am writing in support of the views and representations provided to date by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) concerning the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and two related Bills.

This submission recognises that the Inquiry is inviting comment and input concerning the proposed Stronger Future Bills. However, many of the more significant implications for Indigenous people living in the Northern Territory will be found in the proposed amendments to elements of the Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2011. As such, this submission addresses all three Bills where they impact on Indigenous people living in the Northern Territory, while a further submission from The Salvation Army (AUS) will focus on the Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2011, specifically as it relates to income management, and as it impacts all Australians.

The submission aims to provide a constructive contribution to the Australian Government's efforts to set effective Aboriginal policy, and recognises that this is a responsibility shared by governments and Aboriginal people, their communities and their organisations.

The Salvation Army (AUS) welcomes the Australian Government's stated intention of working in partnership with Aboriginal people, leaders and communities to develop policies that will work to reduce Aboriginal disadvantage, and acknowledges the commitment and enthusiasm of the Australian

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Government in seeking to bring about significant and long-term change for Indigenous communities across the Northern Territory.

While The Salvation Army has not been significantly engaged in the Stronger Futures consultation and policy development processes to date, our review of these materials, input from our officers and staff on the ground in the Northern Territory, together with the considered views of other grassroots organisations such as the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and its members, have informed the comments and advice to the Australian Government that follows.

However, in examining some of the discrepancies, gaps and alternative views identified by numerous key stakeholders concerning the proposed policy directions, it is clear to The Salvation Army (AUS), that the Government must be asked to withdraw the proposed legislation in its current form. Indeed, the Government is respectfully asked to re-engage with communities, community leaders, community organisations and experts to identify alternative ways forward for those aspects of the Stronger Futures policy and related legislative proposals where stakeholders have demonstrated the most disquiet and identified specific alternatives or unacceptable risks.

The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory

The Salvation Army is one of the largest national providers of welfare services. Operating for over 130 years in Australia, The Salvation Army has a significant history working with and advocating for the rights and needs of disadvantaged people in our community. Consistent with our values of human dignity, justice, hope, compassion and community, The Salvation Army is committed to the promotion of social justice and protection of the rights of disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory (AUS), with an annual operating budget of approximately \$300 million, provides over 600 social programs and activities, through a network of social support services, community centres and churches located throughout Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania. In 2010, The Salvation Army (AUS) delivered over 550,000 occasions of service. This included more than 75,000 people provided with emergency relief and over 80,000 meals. On any given night, over 600 crisis and 4,000 non-crisis accommodation beds were also provided.

Key services provided by The Salvation Army (AUS) network include:

- Material aid and Emergency Relief
- Financial counselling and assistance
- Personal counselling and support
- Drug and alcohol support and treatment services
- Family and domestic violence support and accommodation services

- Out of home care
- Accommodation and homelessness services
- Disability services
- Emergency disaster responses
- Education, training and employment support services
- Aged care services.

The Salvation Army also has a strong presence in the Northern Territory, where a significant proportion of services are provided to Indigenous Australians. We therefore welcome the opportunity to provide this submission to the Senate Standing Committee and contribute to its inquiry on the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and two related Bills.

Support for ACOSS position and submission

In summary, and within our capacity as a member organisation, The Salvation Army (AUS) lends its support for the public statements and submissions prepared by ACOSS concerning policy directions affecting Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory. In particular, The Salvation Army refers to and supports the issues and directions outlined in the *ACOSS Submission to Senate Community Affairs Committee: Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2011*. Additionally, The Salvation Army (AUS) adds its name to the list of organisations supporting the ACOSS Media Statement *Cooperation not intervention: a call for a new direction in policies affecting Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory* (23 November 2011).

As outlined in the ACOSS Media Statement, The Salvation Army (AUS) concurs with the key issues identified:

- New policy directions need to be based on cooperation, not 'intervention' (consultation and partnership)
- Punitive, top-down approaches should not be supported (evidence base)
- The need for positive approaches to engage families that take into account the barriers to participation (evidence of what works)
- The need for policies to be informed by evidence

In particular, The Salvation Army (AUS) holds significant concerns about the following key policy processes:

Consultation and Partnership

Following a significant history of mistrust of government, combined with various unintended consequences arising most recently through the Northern Territory Emergency Response, the need for respectful representations and meaningful solutions requires partnerships be built on effective communication and consultation at all stages of policy formulation, development and implementation.

Indeed, consistent with other commentary from various stakeholders around this issue, the Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT) observe that the "...consultations involved in *Stronger Futures* are not seen as an adequate precursor to another round of intervention or policy decisions without the further input and consent of those affected."¹

Similarly, APO NT notes that the cumulative impacts of recent policies have denied opportunities for community leaders to govern their own communities, with few clear processes for community decision making about planning for the future. Community members are being left out of decisions made about their community and 'consulted' at the end of the process at a time where there is little scope to influence decisions. This has resulted in a feeling that Aboriginal people in the NT are 'going backwards' and are disempowered. Effective Aboriginal participation, input and consent is crucial to develop the partnership needed for effective strategies in the Northern Territory².

Evidence

In relation to best practice principles, which require policy and programs to be informed by an appropriate evidence base, The Salvation Army calls on the Australian Government to apply this important principle to the more risky and controversial aspects of *Stronger Futures*. In particular, evidence needs to inform the proposed extension of the SEAM program, together with the involuntary and punitive aspects of income management.

Indeed, The Salvation Army (AUS) noted Minister Macklin's recent call for the need to gather evidence in relation to the Government's policy approach to poker machine reform.³ As such, a consistent approach to policy development would see the same due diligence to evidence across policy portfolios, including the initiatives proposed in *Stronger Futures*.

In addition to making public the two current evaluations of the SEAM program and utilising the findings therein, The Salvation Army (AUS) also calls on the Government to revisit the existing material available from the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse and the Social Inclusion Board in gathering its evidence for policy directions and to minimise the risk of unintended consequences. In particular, the report *What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in the evidence*⁴, outlines the following themes for effective policy and service development:

- Community involvement and engagement
- Adequate resourcing and planned and comprehensive interventions

¹ Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (August 2011) *Response to Stronger Futures*. APO NT, NT., p.3

² Op cit Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (2011)

³ Willingham, R. (2012) *Gillard, Wilkie at loggerheads on reform* The Saturday Age, January 21 2012 p2

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011), *What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in the evidence*. Canberra ACT

- Respect for language and culture
- Working together through partnerships, networks and shared leadership
- Development of social capital
- Recognising underlying social determinants
- Commitment to doing projects with, not for, Indigenous people
- Creative collaboration that builds bridges between public agencies and the community and coordination between communities, non-government and government to prevent duplication of effort
- Understanding that issues are complex and contextual.

The report also identified approaches that do not work such as 'one size fits all', lack of collaboration and poor access to services, external authorities imposing change and reporting requirements, interventions without local Indigenous community control and culturally appropriate adaptation, short-term one-off funding, piecemeal interventions, provision of services in isolation, and failure to develop Indigenous capacity to provide services.

Conclusion

The Salvation Army (AUS) reiterates its support for the Australian Government's efforts to promote a significant program of reform to address Aboriginal disadvantage in the Northern Territory and its stated intention of working in partnership with Aboriginal people, leaders and communities.

However, in view of the fundamental lack of evidence for punitive interventions such as the SEAM program and aspects of non-voluntary income management, together with the failure to adequately engage Aboriginal communities on these issues, The Salvation Army (AUS) calls on the Australian Government to withdraw the proposed legislation in its current form and to re-engage with communities, community leaders, community organisations and experts to identify alternative ways forward.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Stronger Futures Bill and invite you to contact Ms Elli McGavin, Territorial Social Policy and Programme Development Manager by telephone on (03) 8878 4778 or via email elli.mcgavin@aus.salvationarmy.org should you have any queries about this submission.

Yours sincerely



Ian Hamilton (Lieut-Colonel)
Secretary for Program
The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory